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ABSTRACT

There is a real conflict between "humanism" as a point of view and "accountability" as a process. Most of the "accountability" literature today is characterized by a devotion to measurable ends, an implicit belief that the ends justify the means. The other half of the educational equation has to do with educational means, yet many people are ignoring the ethical, human questions which are involved. The United States Office of Education itself is fostering financial dependency among educational institutions by establishing conditional relationships (e.g., if the work is done then the funds are forthcoming.) Obviously, school people are responsible for what they do; and for how they teach, administer, and supervise in schools. However, holding one person or institution "responsible" is different from demanding responsibility for the deeds of another. (Author/WM)

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Who Is Accountable to Whom and for What?

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The basic question posed in this symposium -- "is marriage possible between humanism and accountability? -- implies a conflict between "humanism" as a point of view and "accountability" as a process. That conflict is certainly real. Humanism is a "mode of thought in which human interests predominate."[1] "Accountability means that public schools must prove that students at various levels meet some reasonable standard of achievement."[2] It hardly seems unreasonable to presume that students want and need to learn. It may be stretching the point to presume that students' interests and attaining "some reasonable standard of achievement" as defined by the public schools would always coincide. The debate which is currently raging about "accountability" in its many forms is both essential and significant. Essential because it will help us all to probe the assumptions behind the assumptions; to understand the complexities and the nuances which are involved. Significant because it presses us to the heart of the educational matter; the purposes of education -- what schooling is all about.

In the limited time available to me, I would like to try to examine some of the basic questions and assumptions that are inherent in the title to this paper: Who is accountable to whom and for what? Since most people in education will say, at least, that people are important (and that is what humanism is all about), then a better understanding of "accountability" and "for what" may be the most appropriate points at which to enter the problem.

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[1] The American College Dictionary (New York: Random House, 1961). p. 588.

[2] Frank J. Sciara and Richard K. Jantz. Accountability In American Education (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1972). p. 3.

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Earlier I cited Sciara and Jantz's definition that "accountability means that public schools must prove that students at various levels meet some reasonable standard of achievement " These authors also say that "the concept further implies that schools must show they use funds wisely -- that expenditures justify educational outcomes."[3] One might play games with these authors' words --"that expenditures justify educational outcomes;" "means justify ends" -- but their definition is only one. Perhaps other authorities or advocates mean something different altogether.

Blaschke's approach is somewhat different. In describing performance contracting, he says:

> The performance contract-turnkey approach to school system reform is a managerial concept designed to encourage responsible innovation while holding those in charge accountable for results.[4]

Lessinger makes his point this way:

> Stated most simply, our goal is the guaranteed acquisition of basic skills by all of our children. In this sense, every kid can be a winner.[5] (italics in original)

The Chicago Daily News feature writer Lois Wille reports that "it pays to learn -- and children do!" in a series of articles headlined on the front page of that big city daily. Ms. Wille describes a particular school as follows:

> Pete and Billy are naughty. They are snatching books and crayons from other children at the table, trying to step on their feet and yanking their sleeves. Mrs. Wright (the teacher) does not scold them. Instead, she ignores them and gives little plastic tokens to the children around them who are trying to work.... At the end of the week it will be "store day" in

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Charles Blaschke. Performance Contracting: Who Profits Most? (Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Foundation, 1972). p. 7.

[5] Leon M. Lessinger. Every Kid a Winner: Accountability In Education (Palo Alto: Science Research Associates College Division, 1970). p. 12.

> Mrs. Wright's first grade room. A long table will be filled with toys and candy all with price tags, and a little clerk and cashier and store manager will sell them for tokens.... Gradually Mrs. Wright will shift the emphasis to selling privileges rather than toys and candy.... She even sells the privilege of staying in during recess to talk to her.[6]

Ms. Wille describes the project as a successful venture in raising children's IQ levels in school.

In a lead editorial that same newspaper advocates "getting through to pupils" like this:

> Mrs. Wille has carefully documented results -- and as indicators of what can be done, they are enormously heartening.
>
> In certain kinds of innovative situations, children who were at the bottom of the achievement scale and going nowhere have begun to improve and continued to improve.... And sometimes simple devices have produced these astonishing changes. A red plastic token, symbolizing a prospective reward f[illegible] effort, has set in train major improvements.... When you come down to it, these aren't really "new" or "radical" experiments. Teachers were giving gold stars and favors for performance in Grandma's day....
>
> From the evidence thus far, the enemy seems to be a hard overlay of lethargy blended with prim, rock-ribbed resistance. (One Chicago administrator said of the plastic token idea; "I think it's reprehensible to bribe a child.") So the problem becomes one of how to crack that resistance all along the line: among teachers, principals, administrators, teachers, colleges and parents.[7]

All of these varying perspectives deal with educational ends and educational means, the essence of what schooling is all about. Implicit in each of these illustrations, however, is the kernel concern: the ends justify the means.

Some will probably argue that this poses the concept too harshly. That may be true. One cannot fail to be impressed with tne devotion to measurable ends which characterizes most of the accountability literature today. We all know

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[6] Lois Wille. "It Pays to Learn -- And Children Do!" The Chicago Daily News (October 21, 1971.) p. 1.

[7] "Getting Through To Pupils," Chicago Daily News (October 21, 1971). p. 14.

that the really important objectives of education tend to defy analytic reduction: love; motivation; sense of self worth; and understanding, for example. And we all know that no thoughtful person would consciously employ educational means which tended to destroy or degrade in any way the people who were involved. However, there is certainly some reason to believe that not all persons who press the accountability proposals are "thoughtful." "Rational" they are, but "thoughtful," no!

Just imagine the dilemmas we would face if some experimenter demonstrated conclusively that children taught to read under the stimulus of an electric shock read better than children taught in some more conventional way. A few people, of course, would immediately argue that "it works, therefore we ought to do it." Most persons, of course, would be terribly uncomfortable with that kind of logic.

But the problem is the same: what means are appropriate to achieve the ends of education. In medicine, some physicians have even come to question the appropriateness of employing any technique or device to preserve life, if life itself has lost all of its meaning for the individual because of continuous coma, extensive brain damage due to cerebral hemorrhage, or the like.[8] Is it reasonable to presume that any means short of physical damage to a student should be admissable in school? I would hope not. As Art Combs says: "We can live with a bad reader; a bigot is a danger to everyone." If the educational means fosters bigotry, it ought not be used, in my opinion. If it fosters personality disintegration or negative motivation to learn, it ought not to be used either, in terms of my values, anyway.

Ends are important; goals are crucial; the objectives or education are unbelieveably worthwhile. But they represent only half of the educational equation. The other half, equally important, has to do with educational means. Teal and

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[8] For example, Walter Sackett, M. D., Miami, Florida has introduced a bill in the Florida Legislature based upon a "dignity of death" concept.

Reagan[9] argue forcefully for certain "principles of procedure" as well as "hoped for results," and they make explicit the attention to the ethical concern for which some accountability enthusiasts seem willing to ignore.

My biases are on the table now. I believe very much in the concepts of accountability and responsibility in education, but I am terribly uncomfortable with the ease with which some persons seem to ignore the ethical, human questions which are involved.

For example, Lessinger reproduced portions of the Texarkana project proposal (apparently as a "desirable" example) in his book on accountability. The following quotation from the proposal by the Dorsett company to the Texarkana school board illustrates my concern:

> An important factor in the success of EVCO/Dorsett's learning centers and in the educational research and development performed by EVCO for various government agencies has been the systematic application of the motivational techniques of "contingency management"....
>
> The stimulus for the refinement of contingency management was, quite basically, the difficulty of motivating students to complete PI (programmed instruction) sequences.... To considerably oversimplify, it was found that a great many activities could be identified which the student would prefer to engage in (rather) than going through a PI sequence. These activities, called high-probability behaviors, can be specified by observing students, asking them or sometimes prompting them through the use of a "reinforcement memo." Once an appropriate high-probability behavior is identified, it can be used to reinforce the lower probability behavior of attending to an instructional unit.
>
> This system sounds deceptively simple. Many will say that this is how they've always managed behavior. But the key is to let the student himself identify the desired high-probability behavior, and then to make a "performance contract," either written or verbalized, in which the student agrees to perform a certain amount of low-probability behavior in return for the consideration of being permitted to engage in a higher-probability behavior for a specified period of time.[10] (italics added)

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[9] Stanton Teal and Gerald Reagan. "Educational Goals," in Jack R. Frymier, et. al. A School For Tomorrow (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1973). Chapter Three.

[10] Lessinger. loc. cit., p. 203.

The key is to let the student indicate his interests and then use his interests as a wedge to get him to do what you want him to do, even if he does not want to do it.

I am very reluctant to label a methodology as "unethical" just because I might use a different approach, but I do feel that an ethical question is reflected here. Is it appropriate to bend a child against his will, especially with incentives, when I decide what the ends shall be? The answer to that question is clearly "yes" sometimes and "no" on other occasions. "Yes," it is appropriate to force a youngster not to hurt himself or his fellow students. There is no dispute about that at all. And "no," it is not appropriate to force all students to be quiet while the teacher speaks or to learn reading in a particular way. Between those two extremes, however, the ethical nature of the problem is usually not so apparent, thus the problem remains.

In my own mind, I have come to question the use of "conditional relationships" set forth by the professionals as a basic way of interacting with students in schools. "Conditional relationships" may develop mutually between teachers and students, but when employed unilaterally by either party, there is a tendency for dependency to emerge. Perhaps I can illustrate the idea this way.

In the area of curriculum innovation, school people in recent years have drifted to a point where they say: "If you will give us more money, we will innovate." Implicit in that proposition is the notion that "if you do not give us extra funds, we will stay the same." Certainly the policies and practices the U. S. Office of Education has encouraged that kind of thought process. What the USOE has done, in effect, is to say: "If you will do this, then we will grant you funds." To say it another way: "We will give you money, on the condition that you fulfill our expectations relative to what ought to be accomplished."

The conditional relationship says, in effect, that "if you do this, then I will do that." It specifies, in particular terms, the conditions under which reward or reinforcement shall occur. The net result is that all over America there are school people who say, in effect: "Tell me what the guidelines are, and I will put together a proposal on any topic right away." The contractual notion of mutually agreed upon conditions is one thing, but a unilateral issuing of conditions (i.e., "guidelines") followed by a massive response on the part of professionals to "get their share" of the funds illustrates the tendency to dependency that I referred to before.

If one lists the major areas of emphasis as reflected in USOE policy and guidelines over the last decade or so, the list would look something like this:

Foreign language programs
Science programs
Mathematics programs
Guidance programs
Media development
Library development
Programs for the disadvantaged
Regional Laboratories
R and D Centers
Right to Read programs
Career education
Vocational training
Programs for the handicapped
National Institutes of Education
etc.

There are at least two obvious inferences one might make from a careful study of such a list: (1) USOE programs have been conceptualized to "plug" the gaps and strengthen the weak areas of schools: or (2) there has been no consistent policy, and guidelines have represented the "whims" of the persons in the office at the moment. Point number one is attractive, but it probably would not stand any careful, historical scrutiny. Point number two is probably a more realistic explanation of the diversity in the listing above. For example Howe supported some programs, Keppel others, Allen others, Marland others, and on and on.

However, the point is that the profession has tended to respond to the guidelines as set forth by USOE, whatever they were. As a profession, we have moved toward this tendency to dependency to the point that whatever the guidelines are, we will respond. Why? Because the USOE makes grants, and "he who pays the piper calls the tune." That concept, which is familiar enought, is explained away with such statements as:

> Those fellows in Washington must know what they are doing. They wouldn't spend all of that money on something unless they had studied the situation very carefully.

or:

> We need the money so desperately, we can find a way to bend our concerns to fit their guidelines.

And on and on. Nobody, or almost nobody, points out the ridiculousness of major shifts in policy every few months with corresponding changes in research or program emphases. Why? Because we are dependent on USOE money.

What we actually have is a kind of modern version of "the king who wore no clothes." Thousands of people in the profession are upset and concerned with policy developments or programmatic thrusts which emerge regularly from USOE but almost nobody within the profession has criticized the programs, except to urge more funds. Most of the serious criticisms of USOE activities and policies have come from outside the profession, primarily from Congress.

I do not mean to belabor this point. The basic proposition that I want to try to develop is that, as a profession, we have been evidencing a tendency to dependency, and that same phenomenon is also apparent in many of the accountability models which have been advocated in recent years.

The voucher system, performance contracting, ESEA projects, behavior modification, and other efforts all reflect in greater or lesser degree the conditional relationships which foster dependent rather than independent behavior on the part

of the recipients of funds or the learners who are involved. If my analysis is correct (and it most certainly may not be), then these kinds of activities, which are often cited in accountability models today, must be seriously questioned.

In our society and in our schools the language of relationships might be dichotomized this way: conditional relationships and relationships without conditions. The first is a language of control. The second is a language of love and growth.

The language of conditional relationships sounds something like this:

I will love you if you will do what I say.

I will give you a dollar if you get an "A" in school.

If you will read this book, then I will let you play.

If you keep your room neat and tidy and don't tell any lies, then Santa Claus will bring you a present on Christmas Day.

The language of conditional relationships is an "if-then" language; "if you do this, then I will do that." It assumes the logic of cause and effect. In actual practice it fosters dependent-prone behavior because it invites manipulation of other persons, deception, and control. Such relationships are basically utilitarian -- each person attempts to use the other to achieve his own purposes or goals -- and ethical values are reduced to practical considerations.

Will it work?

Does it get results?

How much does it cost?

Will it take too much time?

I know that such concepts and techniques will work to help a six-year-old who cannot control his bowel movements learn not to soil his britches, but is that any reason to urge that they be adopted in more normal circumstances? I think not.

A friend of mine told the following story about conditional relationships and learning which makes the point quite well.

This friend had been interested for years in language and vocabulary development among the young. One day he was visiting a neighbor, and as he talked with his neighbor's child the little girl told him about a game her parents played to help her learn new words. For every new word for which the child would learn the spelling and the meaning, her parents would give her a quarter. My friend is interested in how children learn new words, of course, and he wanted to go along with things, so he spelled out a big word for the youngster and said: "If you will learn how to spell that word and what it means, I'll give you a quarter." The little girl studied the word and thought about things for a moment, and then replied: "I think that word is worth fifty cents."

That is what happen when we use conditional relationships with anyone as we work to help them learn. They sense that they are objects rather than beings. What they do becomes more important than what they are. The logic encourages them to respond in kind. When we attempt to manipulate other people and control their behavior, they attempt to manipulate us and control what we do.

The logic of unconditional relationships, on the other hand, is the logic of growth rather than the logic of denial or control. Jesus said: "Love thy neighbor." He did not say, "If your neighbor loves you, then love him in return." He did not say, "Do good unto others if they do good to you." Jesus urged men to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The language of relationships without conditions might look something like this:

> I will love you whether you do what I say or not.
>
> I will honor and value you as a person of dignity and worth, whatever you do.
>
> If you kill other people, I will attempt to restrain you, but I will not take you life.
>
> You are important because you are you.

The relationship without conditions is basically a voluntary relationship. Only when people are free to separate is there meaning in coming and being together. Compulsory relationships rob both parties of their integrity. Both the captor and the slave are prisoners of the compulsory system. The power of a voluntary relationship, on the other hand, is absolutely fantastic. Physician and patient, man and wife, friend and friend. The freedom to go apart -- to separate and leave -- gives significance and strength to the relationships which generate and are maintained. People who come together and stay together, without conditions and without bonds, are able to help one another develop and grow as no conditional relationship can ever assure.

There are many occasions, of course, in which people deliberately place themselves in a learning situation where they are extremely dependent upon the teacher. This sense of dependence may be a function of the fact that decisions and actions of great impact are involved. It may arise because of complete novelty or lack of experience in the situation, or it may emerge because of the detail and complexity of information which are apparent. Any combination of these factors simply heightens the sense of dependence of student upon teacher in the teaching-learning situation.

If a person is a medical student, for example, or a student pilot, almost any learning situation in which he may find himself is potent with possibilities which could affect or curtail human life, sometimes his own. The student pilot, for example, is dependent upon his instructor for information and assistance, since anything that he does affects life and limb. The same would be true if a person was learning to fire a 4.2 inch mortar, take LSD, drive an authomobile, SCUBA dive, or jump from an airplane with a parachute for the very first time. The sense of danger makes a learner feel dependent upon the teacher.

Likewise, if a person wants to learn to play the trumpet, build an electronic organ, write a novel, or program a computer, the lack of experience in any of

these endeavors may make him feel completely dependent upon his teacher. Even if he has had some experience in an area and even if there was no actual danger to persons involved, if the goal to be achieved required intricate patterns of information, awareness of nuances and subtleties which are not easily observable, or vast sums of factual knowledge which he simply did not possess, he would be forced by circumstances to be dependent upon his teacher. If a student wants to test a biological theory, analyze the content of a chemical solution, read a foreign newspaper, repair an airplane engine, or navigate the open ocean in a sailboat, for example, he needs precise technical data and particular problem solving skills. Lacking these, he has a sense of inadequacy; he is dependent upon those who are intent upon helping him learn to do those kinds of things.

If a learner feels dependent in a teaching-learni g situation, and if he hopes to master whatever factual knowledge or concept or skill is involved, then over a period of time (the learning period), he must move from a state of dependence to a state of independence, or his teacher will have failed.

In other words, mastering the intricacies of flying an airplane, for example, are not enough. Upon the completion of that learning, if the student pilot is still afraid to do any of those things on his own except when his teacher is there to "bail him out" if he does wrong, then he still must be classed as "incompetent" or a "a failure." And those labels are appropriate despite the fact that "he knows" most if not all that he is "supposed to know" in whatever learning area is involved.

What I am arguing for, of course, is a direction, an inclination, a tendency, if you please. It is extremely difficult in our condition-laden culture to place oneself and function in a completely non-conditional role. Even so, I am urging a deliberate shift from conditional relationships between teacher and

child and between supervisor and teacher in the direction of relationships without conditions, where honest interaction and non-coercive efforts would always prevail.

To make that shift, the only thing we have to change is our minds. We do not need any special understandings or particular facts or unusual skills. All we need is a set of assumptions which characterize those with whom we work as persons of integrity and worth. If we <u>believe</u> that they want to learn, they will. If we believe that they want to work, they will. A child on drugs or a youngster conditioned for years to being dealt with evasively or with deception will have his own "resistance" to change which must be overcome, but that can be done. Most persons are not in one of those extreme categories at all. Most people are honest, open, looking forward to new experiences and novelty and they want a chance to learn. Most people are absolutely intrigued if another person relates to them in a non-conditional way.

Now consider, if you will, these ideas in relation to some of the propositions which are inherent in the concepts of accountability, as those are being propounded today. Accountability is a terribly important idea. It must be explored and debated in every way.

We learned from the Nuremburg war trials that men must be held accountable for what they do. The Mai Lai incident carved that concept deeply in our conscience again. As a people, our history is an oft told story of responsibility and freedom. Holding people responsible for what they do is a notion almost as old as time.

But holding one man responsible for what he does is not the same as holding one man responsible for the deeds of another. No man, in fact, should be held responsible for what another person does or does not do, in my opinion. Even

parents cannot be held responsible for the deeds or misdeeds of their own children, although some would like to arrange it so that might be true. The story[11] about the recently passed ordinances in Michigan holding parents responsible for what their children do attests to the fact that the concept of assigned responsibility is not a part of our heritage. One of the commissioners who passed the ordinance even feels that it is unconstitutional, but he wonders aloud: "If parents aren't responsible for their children, who the hell is?" The answer, at least in some people's minds, is the school.

The school and school people are thought by many to be responsible for what children do. Learning has always been defined in terms of behavioral change. The father who complains to the teacher -- "our boy is in the third grade now, and he still sasses his mother" is suggesting that the school is to blame. How arrogant and impudent can people be?

Obviously school people are responsible for what they do, for how they teach and administer and supervise in schools. Obviously school people must give an accounting for their own behaviors, for their own personal and professional conduct, for what they do or do not do. It is completely inappropriate, however, to argue that one man ought to be hald accountable for the thoughts and deeds of another person. That is guilt by association under a new and fancy name.

For example, hold my feet to the fire for what I write in this paper. Insist that my statements and my logic be soundly reasoned and validly based. Be adamant if I do not present my propositions with strength of conviction and clarity of prose. But do not hold me responsible for what you do with these ideas after you have finished reading the pages here. Do not insist that it is my fault if you do not do my bidding. Do not argue that I am responsible if you fail to heed my suggestions.

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11 "A Father is Tried For What His Son Did," Life. Vol. 72, No. 6 (February 18, 1972). pp. 61-64.

I sincerely hope when you have finished reading this paper that you will weave some bit of what I say into your own professional efforts and your own understanding about what education is and what it could be. But if someone tries to hold me responsible for what you do, then I may be forced to go beyond the reasonable limits of persuasion and communication. I may have to manipulate not only the environment, but also you. If I would have to be responsible for what you do, then I would work in every way that I know to control your behavior; to limit your choice; to channel your thoughts and feelings and actions along lines that I approve. Without those limitations, you might do what you want to do. And if I have to be responsible for your behavior and being, that cannot be condoned; not even allowed.

Perhaps my point is made. Physicians cannot be held accountable that patients stay alive and well, only that they conscientiously try to keep them that way. Attorneys cannot be held accountable to win each case -- half lose every time.

Owners can be held responsible for what their dogs or cows or horses do, but people are different. Our laws and our customs, our beliefs and our heritage all argue convincingly that each man can be held accountable for his own behavior, but not for another's. Each man is responsible for what he himself does, but not for the actions or inactions of others.

We have worked for too many centuries to assign responsibility to the individual to allow it to slip away to either vague or precise definitions of state or school.

The most violent rending in our nation's history was a wild and mauling war fought to grant personal freedom to hundreds of thousands of men. It is not to our credit today that Lincoln preserved the union and freed the slaves. It is not to our credit that Nixon bridged the gap in time and space between America and China. Nixon took that step, not us. He led the way. Whatever credit or blame is involved rests on his shoulders. We can be neither proud nor

blamed for what other men have done.

And that is precisely how it ought to be. The President of the United States is accountable to the people of the United States for what he does. If we approve of political figures' efforts and think well of their actions, we will vote them into office again. If we disapprove of their efforts and disagree with their actions, we will not vote them into office again. They are responsible to us for what they do. Each person is accountable in the best sense of that term. But most of us would be terribly uncomfortable if we felt that any political figure -- president, governor, senator, sheriff -- was accountable for what we do or that we were accountable for what they do.

I am not responsible for what my forefathers did to blacks or women or Jews. I am directly responsible for what I do. I am not accountable for what my grandfather or my wife or my administrative superiors or my colleagues do. I am responsible for my teaching, my arguments, my interpretations, my learning, if you please. But not for yours.

Nor do I want to be. You have your life to live, your commitments to cherish, your proposals to make, your own ways to behave. We need persuasion, not coersion; discussion, not demands. Accountability is an important and powerful concept, but it dare not be misused.